

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

for the year ended December 31st, 1939.

To Thetford Urban District Council.

Gentlemen,

I beg to submit my Annual Report for 1939. It has been delayed this year owing to the late receipt of the Registrar-General's figures. By instructions of the Minister of Health, the report has been cut down to essential details with a view to saving paper and printing. The report is confined to essential and urgent matters which have affected the public health, especially any matters arising from or connected with the war, outbreaks of infectious disease and measures for maternity and child welfare, together with any exceptional administrative measures taken or recommended during the year.

SECTION A.—STATISTICS AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF THE AREA.

Area 7,096 Acres.

Registrar-General's estimate of—

(a). Resident Population mid 1939—3987.

(b). Average population appropriate to the calculation of death rates—4174

Number of inhabited houses (end of 1939) according to Rate Books—1,296.

Rateable Value—£17,236.

Sum represented by a penny rate—£67 os. 4d.

Vital Statistics.

			Total.	M.	F.	
Live Births {	Legitimate ...	...	57	27	30	} Birth Rate per 1,000 estimated resident population—15.
	Illegitimate ...	...	3	1	2	
Still Births	...	...	2			Rate per 1,000 births—32.1.
Deaths	...	...	61	26	35	Death Rate per 1,000 estimated population—12.6.

Deaths from Puerperal causes (Headings 29 and 30 of the Registrar-General's short list):—

		Deaths.	Rate per 1,000 Births.
No. 29 Puerperal Sepsis	...	Nil.	Nil.
No. 30 Other Puerperal causes	...	Nil.	Nil.
Total	...	Nil.	Nil.
Death Rate of Infants under 1 year	...	...	Nil.
Deaths from Cancer	...	...	11
„ „ Measles	...	...	Nil.
„ „ Whooping Cough (all ages)	...	...	Nil.
„ „ Diarrhoea (under 2 years of age)	...	...	Nil.

Principal causes of death were Heart Disease 23, Cancer 11, Diseases of the Lungs 4, Apoplexy 6.

Ages at death. Over 90—2, over 80—19, over 70—39.

SECTION B.—GENERAL PROVISIONS OF HEALTH SERVICES IN THE AREA.

Paragraphs 1 and 2 remain the same as last year.

(iii). Maternity and Child Welfare.

This work has been carried out as usual by the Thetford and District Maternity and Child Welfare Association. Up to the outbreak of war the work went on quietly and with increasing appreciation by the mothers in the Town. The quarterly average attendance of children kept in the neighbourhood of 28, and the Maternity Clinics were attended in increasing numbers with the help of Nurse Bourne. It is fortunate that the routine working of the Association was so well established, and thoroughly tried, in view of what was to come, and I am very glad to say

that the fabric, which had been built up by so many years of work by the Voluntary Personnel of the Association, stood up to the strain which was put upon it on the outbreak of war and the evacuation of the London population. I cannot too highly commend the efficient manner in which they met the strain and adapted the work of the Centre to the new conditions. Difficulties were many and often harassing. The evacuated population were accustomed to an entirely different appreciation of the intentions of a Child Welfare Centre. It required quiet patience and tact on the part of our helpers to guide these harassed mothers to the idea that a Welfare Centre was a source of guidance to them in their troubles in rearing their children, and not, as they seemed to think, a free-food depôt. It was hard and often unappreciated work but I am glad to say it bore good results. I have been very struck with the improvement which has taken place in the general condition of those children who have remained in the Town. They are rapidly approximating to the standard which we have been accustomed to at our Centre, and mothers seem to be increasingly grateful for the help which was afforded them. I would like you to realise the position in which our workers were placed. Without any warning 260 children of the welfare age were suddenly introduced into the Town, many of them accustomed to attending Welfare Centres. It was obvious that our normal clinics could not deal with such numbers, so the clinic was opened every week instead of every second week. This, at the beginning, was quite inadequate, so Nurse Sowels opened her garden to those who could not get attendance at the Centre and saw them there. I am glad to say that all the children who wished to be seen were seen either at the Clinic, or the garden during the first two weeks of the war. Fortunately, this state of affairs did not continue, as a large proportion of the evacuees returned to their homes, and the four clinics a month soon dealt with those who remained satisfactorily. No figures could be kept of the numbers attending the clinics during September as there was no time to do it. When things settled down in October, visits were paid by the Nurse to 75 children who still remained in the town and 136 visits were paid to them. The number gradually diminished and by the end of December about 30 children remained. The question of the provision of free milk for these children was a great difficulty as the funds of the Association could not stand the strain of providing it. I approached the County M.O.H. on this subject and pointed out that with two homes to keep and the small allowance given to evacuees, help was required for the children. He was most helpful and eventually suggested that the cost of the milk should be borne by the County Welfare Committee, and I presume that this was done as the children are having the milk. The clothing of the children, due no doubt to their sudden evacuation from London, was in many cases deficient, so the Centre was opened two days a week for the distribution of clothing kindly provided by the people in the town. Practically none of the families were able to bring their prams with them and a great effort was made by the staff to provide them. I am glad to say this was very successful and most of the families were accommodated. The W.V.S. were very useful in this work and our own personnel provided 15, many of which were retrieved from the county districts. Another problem with which we were faced was the expectant mother. No arrangements had been made for them as the Evacuation Committee had received no information that such accommodation would be required. It was 10 o'clock at night when the Town Clerk informed me on the telephone that there were 48 expectant mothers, some with children, who were not provided with billets, and many of them had been on their feet since 7 o'clock in the morning. By the kindness of the owners of the two Nursing homes in the town and the Matron of St. Barnabas Hospital they were all accommodated by 11.30 p.m., and next day billets were provided for them. The question of Ante-Natal examination and treatment then arose. The house next to Nurse Hind's Nursing Home was taken and equipped and 20 mothers were accommodated there. Dr. Bewers, with Nurse Hinds, kindly undertook their supervision. The remainder were put in billets and I opened the Clinic at St. Barnabas Hospital at 10.30 daily for the examinations. Nurse Bourne undertook the routine visitation of the cases in their billets and brought the cases to the Clinic for examination. In this way all the mothers received efficient supervision. It was not possible to take them at the usual Ante-Natal Clinic as the numbers would not allow of it owing to the number of Thetford mothers attending there. The great part of this work proved unnecessary as most of the mothers went home again and relieved the whole situation. After a time the County Council established a fully equipped Maternity Home at Saham Hall to which our patients were sent for their confinements, the W.V.S. supplying the transport. The Home is now closed down and any cases are treated at the Nursing Homes or at St. Barnabas Hospital.

The routine work of the Association has been carried on as usual and I would point out that once again there is a nil Maternal Mortality and Infant death rate, due, I am sure, to the close supervision which the mothers and children receive. Mrs. Carter has continued in charge of the Maternity Bags and Mrs. Baly of the tea arrangements. We are much indebted to them for their help. I regret to record the death of Mrs. Bidwell. She was the first President of the Association and it was mainly through her exertions that the movement was started in the town. Towards the end of the last war when supplies of milk were low and very expensive, she started a Milk Depôt and supplied it from her own cows to ensure that the children would have adequate supplies of milk. When I returned from service she approached me with a view to perpetuating the good work she had started. The Centre was then started in the Town Hall under very inadequate conditions and with purely voluntary help. Later the Centre was brought under Government supervision and recognised for grant with a paid Nurse and Doctor. Mrs. Bidwell continued her interest, and when she and her step-daughters acquired the Old Malting, part of it was fitted up to provide a really first class Child Welfare Clinic with all the accommodation required. The Town owes a great debt of gratitude for the work she has done for the Child Welfare Movement.

The returns for the various Clinics for the year are as follows:—

Child Welfare Clinic.

No. of Mothers attending	...	...	...	...	...	156
„ „ attendances made	...	...	...	...	...	581
„ „ Children attending	...	...	...	...	...	716
Average attendance per Clinic	...	...	...	...	...	23.8
No. of Home Visits paid	...	...	...	...	...	2,340
Free Milk provided	...	...	...	...	...	433 Gallons.

Ante-Natal Clinic.

No. of Mothers attending	...	...	...	...	...	37
No. of attendances by them	...	...	...	...	...	66
Dental cases	...	...	...	...	...	15
No. of visits by Nurse to Dentist	...	...	...	...	...	27

Post-Natal Clinic.

Number of Mothers attending	...	...	...	...	...	19
No. of visits	...	...	...	...	...	19

St. Barnabas Hospital Clinic.

No. of Ante-Natal cases attending	...	...	...	...	...	22
No. of attendances	...	...	...	...	...	55
No. of Post-Natal cases attending	...	...	...	...	...	15
No. of attendances	...	...	...	...	...	184
No. of sessions held	...	...	...	...	...	140

Our thanks are more than ever due to those ladies and gentlemen who give so much time to this work and without whose help it would soon fail.

SECTION C.—SANITARY CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE AREA.

Water.

A small extension of the Public Water supply was carried out during the year to supply the 22 new houses on the Housing Estate on Bury Road. The public supply was in every way satisfactory both in quality and quantity. No difficulty was experienced during the latter part of the year in maintaining the extra supply needed to meet the increased population due to the influx of evacuees and troops. The supply is excellent in yield and the extra demands only necessitated extra hours of pumping. The Public Analyst reports as follows:—“This water is of high organic and bacteriological quality. It is a pure and wholesome water fit for drinking and all purposes of Public Supply.”

Closet Accommodation.

The changes are as follows:—1 Pail Closet converted to W.C., 21 Vaults converted to Pails. 22 Pails were added to supply the new houses in Bury Road, and 4 W.C's. were installed in other houses.

And so the fight goes on against the antiquated Privy Vault, gradually replacing them with Sanitary Pails and, I hope, eventually with W.C's.

The totals now stand as follows:—W.C's., 311, Pails 616, Privies 393.

Sanitary Inspection of Area.

No. of Inspections for general nuisances	...	...	...	...	...	347
„ „ informal notices received	...	...	...	...	...	26
„ „ Statutory notices received	...	...	...	...	...	Nil.
„ „ nuisances abated	...	...	...	...	...	24
„ „ notices in hand	...	...	...	...	...	2

All the usual inspections were carried out.

SECTION D.—HOUSING.

General routine Housing inspections have been carried out up to the outbreak of war. 22 new houses were opened by the local authority and occupied by tenants of overcrowded and insanitary houses. This enabled the Council to deal with certain insanitary property. 7 old houses were voluntarily closed.

SECTION E.—INSPECTION AND SUPERVISION OF FOOD.

(a). Milk Supply.

As in previous years. 87 samples were taken and tested by Lactometer. One sample was submitted to the Public Analyst and passed as genuine.

(b). **Meat and other foods.**

Routine inspection of Killed Meat at the Slaughterhouses was systematically carried out, 236 lbs. being condemned as unfit for human consumption.

SECTION F.—PREVALENCE OF AND CONTROL OVER INFECTIOUS AND OTHER DISEASES.

The usual methods of dealing with Infectious Diseases were carried out. The offer of immunisation against Diphtheria has failed to attract any numbers of children. Only a few have received the treatment.

Notifications.

Disease.	Total Cases notified.	Cases admitted to Hospital.	Total Deaths.
Scarlet Fever	1	1	Nil.
Diphtheria	1	1	Nil.
Pneumonia	2	Nil.	Nil.
Puerperal Pyrexia	1	Nil.	Nil.
Erysipelas	2	Nil.	Nil.

Tuberculosis.

Age Periods.	New Cases.				Deaths.			
	Respiratory.		Non-Respiratory.		Respiratory.		Non-Respiratory.	
	M	F.	M	F	M	F	M	F
1 to 5	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—
15 to 25	1	1	—	—	1	—	—	—
25 to 35	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
35 to 45	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Totals	1	2	1	2	1	—	—	—

All documents on which this report is founded will be preserved as suggested by the Minister with a view to the presentation of a full comprehensive report at the end of the war.

The duties of your Sanitary Inspector and Surveyor have been heavily increased by the emergency, and I would like to record my great appreciation of the way he has met the vastly increased amount of work, and the efficient manner in which he has dealt with it.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

ARCH. OLIVER, M.D., D.P.H.,

M.O.H., Thetford.

Thetford,
16th December, 1940.